

USPS Advice

Every spring we call all the Post Offices listed in our books, and every year the USPS gets more confusing. If you call two different Post Offices, you will get different answers to the same questions. If you call the same Post Office twice you will get different answers to the same questions. For example:

- (1) Some Postmasters will tell you that you **MUST** include the **physical street address of the Post Office when sending General Delivery mail**. Some Postmasters will tell you the physical street address is not necessary. Some Postmasters in towns which do not have street delivery of mail will tell you that including the physical street address of a Post Office on a General Delivery address will result in the package automatically returned to sender.
- (2) **Post Office policy is that General Delivery mail must be picked up within 30 days of arrival**; if it is not picked up in 30 days, it will be returned. Most Post Offices in trail towns will hold hiker mail much longer than 30 days, because the Postmasters have been working with hikers for many years. However, some Postmasters are sticklers for the rules, and will not bend them for anyone.
- (3) **Post Office policy is that any mail with a tracking number must be picked up within 15 days of arrival**; if it is not picked up in 15 days, it will be returned to sender. As a favor to hikers, some Postmasters will scan the tracking numbers as “delivered,” and they will keep the packages at the Post Office until the hikers pick them up. The problem with this is that you could look online to see the status of your package, it shows as “delivered,” you **KNOW** you have not picked it up, you panic thinking someone else has your package. In reality, the Postmaster was simply doing you a favor. It’s a Catch-22.

So what happens to a General Delivery package with a tracking number? General Delivery is supposed to be held for 30 days, items with tracking numbers are supposed to be returned after 15 days, and **ALL** packages have tracking numbers – oh, the horror! Different Post Offices handle this differently.

- (4) **Post Office policy is that General Delivery mail MUST have the words “General Delivery” in the address**. Without the words “General Delivery,” the packages are supposed to be rejected. As a favor to hikers, some trail town Postmasters will hold incorrectly addressed mail, because the Postmasters recognize hiker mail when they see it.
- (5) **Mail shipped by UPS or FedEx to a General Delivery address** which includes the street address of the Post Office will be delivered to the clerk at the Post Office. The Post Office will keep it using their General Delivery Policy. However, when you go to pick it up, you will be required to pay USPS postage. Yes, you already paid UPS/FedEx postage, but UPS/FedEx already delivered it – to the Post Office. For the Post Office to deliver it to you, you must pay USPS postage.

- (6) **FedEx Smart Post and UPS Sure Post** are hybrid shipping systems where the package starts out in the hands of FedEx or UPS. When the package gets near the destination, it is turned over to the USPS. The USPS completes the delivery. This is often a nightmare in small towns, especially those which do not have street delivery of USPS mail. FedEx/UPS will tell you your package will ship with no problems; in reality you may never get it. ALWAYS ask FedEx/UPS if they are using only their delivery, or if it is a hybrid program involving the USPS. You do NOT want them to use the hybrid programs.

Are you confused yet? Welcome to our world. The good thing is that Postmasters genuinely want customers to receive their mail. Postmasters in trail towns are especially helpful. If you have any questions regarding your packages, simply call the Post Office where the package is to be delivered (phone numbers are included in the Town Guide portion of our books).

Let's say your Mom mailed a General Delivery package to you on July 1. The package has a tracking number. It arrives at the Post Office on July 5. Technically, you must pick it up by July 20 (because it has a tracking number). But maybe you got delayed and you won't arrive in town until July 25. Call the Post Office before June 20, be polite and kind, ask them to hold your package until you arrive. Chances are very good that they will keep it for you.

Our takeaway from all this:

Always err on the conservative side, and assume your hiker mail will only be held for 15 days.

IMPORTANT: Trail and town information changes all the time. As we get updates to trail and town information, we will revise our update files. This will happen while you are hiking. Make sure that whoever is doing your maildrops knows how to access these files. It could mean the difference between you getting your packages or not.

Have a great hike!

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